

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3770

S E C R E T PEKING 950

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR CH CB

SUBJECT: PRC STATEMENTS ON U.S. RESPONSE TO SEIZURE OF "MAYAGUEZ"

REF: A. STATE 110673 B. PEKING 913 C. PEKING 925 D. PEKING 929

1. BY NOW THE DEPARTMENT WILL HAVE SEEN FBIS REPORTS OF LI HSIEN-NIEN'S STATEMENT AT THE MAY 15 VIETNAMESE RECEPTION IN PEKING IN WHICH HE DESCRIBED THE U.S. RESPONSE TO CAMBODIAN SEIZURE OF THE "MAYAGUEZ" AS "AN OUTRIGHT ACT OF PIRACY" AND CLAIMED THAT THE SHIP WAS IN CAMBODIAN TERRITORIAL WATERS. WE HAVE JUST RECEIVED THE MAY 16 PEOPLE'S DAILY IN WHICH LI'S REMARKS ARE SUB-HEADLINED UNDER A REPORT OF THE RECEPTION. ON THE INSIDE PAGES PEOPLE'S DAILY ALSO CARRIES LENGTHY CAMBODIAN NEWS AGENCY REPORT OF U.S. ACTIONS AND AN NCNA ARTICLE WHICH TAKES THE SAME LINE AS LI HSIEN-NIEN BUT, IN ADDITION, ALLEGES THAT "MAYAGUEZ" WAS CARRYING ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT AND ENGAGING IN SPYING ACTIVITIES.

2. PRC STATEMENTS ARE BEING REPORTED PROMINENTLY BY LOCAL FOREIGN PRESS CORPS, SO WE CAN EXPECT THE CHINESE POSITION TO BE WIDELY DISSEMINATED OUTSIDE OF CHINA. GIVEN THE PRC'S TOTAL UNWILLINGNESS TO TRY AND ASSIST IN PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF THIS PROBLEM, INCLUDING HUANG CHEN'S REFUSAL EVEN TO LISTEN TO THE DEPUTY SECRETARY'S REQUEST (REF A), I THINK IT IS TIME TO GO PUBLIC WITH AN ACCOUNT OF OUR EFFORTS TO REACH THE CAMBODIANS AND WARN THEM BEFORE IT WAS NECESSARY TO USE MILITARY FORCE. THE CHINESE ARE OBVIOUSLY TRYING TO HAVE IT BOTH WAYS ON THIS ONE, WITH TENG HSIAO-P'ING

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MAKING IT CLEAR IN PARIS THAT PEKING WOULD DO NOTHING IF U.S. DID USE

FORCE TO SECURE THE SHIP'S RELEASE, WHILE LI HSIEN-NIEN BLASTS US HERE

FOR "PIRACY".

3. SINCE SOME OF OUR EFFORTS ARE ALREADY LEAKING OUT IN THE PRESS AND THE CONGRESS IS LIKELY TO ASK FOR THE WHOLE STORY, I THINK IT IS TO OUR ADVANTAGE TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE BY PRESENTING THE FULL PICTURE FROM THE START.

4. I RECOGNIZE THERE ARE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN SUCH AN APPROACH, SOME MEMBERS OF MY STAFF HAVE ARGUED THAT THE CHINESE HAVE LITTLE TO LOSE BY OUR GOING PUBLIC AND THE EFFECT WOULD SIMPLY TO PROLONG THE ACRIMONIOUS EXCHANGES OVER WHO WAS AT FAULT. NEVERTHELESS, I THINK ON BALANCE THERE IS MERIT IN SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON THOSE EFFORTS WE MADE TO AVOID HAVING TO TAKE MILITARY ACTION AND, IN ADDITION, LETTING THE CHINESE KNOW THAT THEIR PROPAGANDA WILL NOT ALWAYS GO UNANSWERED. THE CHINESE HAVE DIRECTLY CHALLENGED PRESIDENT FORD'S VERSION OF THE INCIDENT AND WE SHOULD AT LEAST SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT.

BUSH

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